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AUTHOR Reither, James A.
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ABSTRACT

An academic discipline is created and embodied in discourse, which functions on two dimensions: the global, disciplinary level suggested by T. Kuhn and others, and the local, institutional level, such as the workshop or laboratory where practitioners carry on the discipline's day-to-day business of research, teaching, and writing. The discipline authorizes the activities of the workshop, and in so doing both drives and constrains it. The workshop, on the other hand, feeds and shapes the discipline. Thus the relationship between the discipline and the workshop is reciprocal. In the workshop, practitioners function as investigators or gatherers and as members of the discipline they function as reporters or negotiators of the results of inquiry. Workshop language tends to be explanatory, private, and opinionated, rather than presentational, public, reasoned, and altruistic. In most composition texts, invention is viewed as a private--rather than social--act, but information, ideas, and arguments result from interaction with peers in workshops and with the literature of the discipline. Furthermore, learning to write means discovering that written texts are conversational utterances and understanding the power of written texts to develop new knowledge, to change others' behavior and beliefs, and to establish social-professional relationships in situations where learning and intellectual identity matter. (SRT)

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Academic Discourse Communities, Invention, and Learning to Write

James A. Reither
Department of English
St. Thomas University
Fredericton, NB
E3B 5G3 Canada

James A. Reither, Associate Professor of English at St. Thomas University in Fredericton, NB Canada, is founder and Editor of *Inkshed*, newsletter of the Canadian Association for the Study of Writing and Reading.

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> There's this to say about expression: We are all alike, so we can understand each other; and we are all different, so we have things to tell each other. The sameness makes communication possible, and the difference makes it worth while.
>
> (David Vestal 304)

Academic Discourse Communities

Disciplines are fields of inquiry, branches of instruction and learning. Scholars who have defined disciplines from a social perspective have characterised them as academic discourse communities. Michael Oakeshott, for one, identifies philosophy as "a voice in the conversation of mankind" (Rorty 264). Clifford Geertz says "anthropology exists in the book, the article, the lecture. . ." (16). And Louise Wetherbee Phelps talks about composition studies as "a scene of action, a 'sphere of activity or influence'" involving relationships among "a group of inquirers, a characteristic attitude toward phenomena, the objects of inquiry themselves, the means of inquiry, its purposes, and scenic factors" (182).

More elaborately, Thomas Kuhn tells us that scientific disciplines are "language communities" (175) populated by the practitioners of scientific specialties. These practitioners are people who have "undergone similar educations and professional initiations; in the process they have absorbed the same technical literature and drawn many of the same lessons from it. Usually the boundaries of that standard literature mark the limits of a scientific subject matter, and each community ordinarily has a subject matter of its own" (177). Kuhn demonstrates how scientific communities construct, reconstruct, and maintain themselves through argument and counterargument (152). Through persuasion "a particular set of shared values interacts with the particular experiences shared by a community of specialists to ensure that most members of the group will ultimately find one set of arguments rather than another decisive" (200).

The members of Kuhn's scientific discourse communities share[1] educational background, disciplinary literature, subject matter, values, and discipline-related experience. They also share such other identifying and community-building elements as a well-developed fund of

'symbolic generalizations' (182), 'commitments to . . . beliefs' (184), paradigms in the sense of 'exemplars' (186–187), persuasion techniques and strategies (200), language (203), and 'constellation[s] of mental sets' (204). These key elements in any 'disciplinary matrix' (182) are encountered in a 'special place in the curriculum' and then practiced and extended in the discourse carried out in journals and in the discipline's professional societies (19).

Two notions are important in this social view of academic disciplines. The first is that disciplines are the products of conversations among 'knowledgeable peers' (Bruffee 642) who through their discourse construct the knowing and the modes of knowing that identify disciplines and distinguish them from others. This is the full force of the claim that disciplines are discourse communities. The second notion, following more or less commonsensically from the first, is that the knowing and discourse which really matter in disciplines are their *public* knowing and discourse. That is, since we tend to conceptualize disciplines as bodies of knowledge—as entities—we also tend to assume they are coequal to the texts practitioners publish as books, articles, and conference lectures.[2]

If we look at our own discipline from the perspective provided us by Oakeshott, Geertz, Kuhn, and many others, we recognize all the requisite trappings. We find workshops, conferences, symposia; newsletters, journals, books—the oral and print media through which we exercise our voices in the conversation. We take up membership in the NCTE, the Four Cs, the CEA, the Rhetoric Society of America, perhaps even the MLA— the professional societies and organizations who sponsor such gatherings and publications. We work comfortably in our knowledge that the members of this discipline share similar educational backgrounds and initiations, that we function pretty much as peers who recognize and study the community's major questions, problems, and issues. These are people with whom we explore the discipline's intellectual frontiers. With them we share—in differing degrees, to be sure, but share nevertheless— values, objects of inquiry, research methodologies, evidential contexts, persuasion strategies and conventions, forms and formats, conversational fora. Above all, we share a grounding in the central texts of the discipline's literature.

We participate in the conversation because these are people we can talk to. Our intellectual kinship and sense of common cause, grounded in our discourse, allow us to understand one another (or at least to seem to do so). Our intellectual and intentional differences, on the other hand, allow possibilities for self-identity and authority within the commonality. We define ourselves both in relation to and against the community's discourse, at the same time embracing and critiquing motives, values, methodologies, knowing. We can talk to our fellows because we know where we stand in this intellectual and social community.

Like all ongoing conversations, both oral and written, ours is both grounded in and meant to modify the community's knowing as constituted in and through previous discourse. As Kenneth Bruffee says, knowledge is "a thing people make and remake. . . . It is what together we agree it is, for the time being" (646). Our rhetoric, according to Nevin Laib, "negotiates conventions, roles, and attitudes, determining the network of belief that will be passed on to the next generation" (582). In "historical" terms, then, academic discourse is a cumulative social activity which creates and is the discipline. Having accumulated, discourse provides the intellectual, social context through which academics, as academics and as members of disciplines, know and function. In social process terms, academic discourse—indeed, *all* discourse—is all process, all transaction. The texts making up the literature of the discipline function as *acts*, utterances, turn-takings in the ongoing conversation.

"From this point of view," says John Gage,

> knowledge can be considered as something which people *do* together, rather than as something which any one person, outside of discourse, *has*. Knowledge can be said to be valid, that is, to the extent that it can be shared. (156)

According to this perspective, a discipline is not simply a body of knowledge plus its practitioners. Knowledge is not a thing, it's an intersubjective process; and a discipline's knowing cannot be separated from the ongoing conversation practitioners carry on with one another. The conversation is itself the primary, foundational disciplinary activity, providing the very core of practitioners' knowing. The conversation, in all its utterances from all its speakers and writers, is the discipline. And we are the conversers.

Obviously, members of academic discourse communities do not converse with each other only in the pages of journals and books and in the meeting rooms of conferences. Although disciplinary authority might be based on what happens in articles, books, and lectures, academic discourse communities do not exist only in their "official" literatures. Neither do they function only in the global, "disciplinary" dimension defined by Oakeshott, Geertz, and Kuhn. As Kuhn intimates, and as a relatively new discipline (the sociology of science) recognises, academic discourse communities also operate in more local, institutional dimensions—in the lab or the workshop, at the school, the college, the university.

The discourse embodying the community's "official" knowing is, in fact, merely the tip of the disciplinary iceberg. Only a small number of a discourse community's members take formal turns in the discussion ongoing in the texts of conference papers, articles, and books; and, of course, only a very tiny fraction of the community's conversational utterances are ever

projected into those disciplinary fora. For every one of these conversers there are many who seem to be merely eavesdroppers, but who participate in (and contribute to) the conversation in other ways and other places—in the margins of journal articles and books, for example, and on note pads, in hallway and office exchanges with colleagues, in memos, and in faculty meetings with allies and opponents alike; in the classroom; in proposals for curriculum change and for research grants; and perhaps even in networks and "invisible colleges" of various sorts.

If, then, we wish to understand what a discipline is, we must attend to more than its official, published texts and their intertextual relationships and identity. If we accept the notion that a discipline is created and embodied in discourse, then we must look at all its discourse, not just at the discourse which takes form as conference papers, articles, and books. We must also include in the equation discoursing acts that occur on other levels and in other dimensions. If we look at other uses for texts in discourse communities, and to the situations in which texts arise and function, we will focus attention not only on dimensions of disciplines that are somewhat hidden in the ways we have previously discussed them; we will also gain insight, first, into the social dimensions of invention, and second, into how we might enable students to experience the enlivening power of writing that is grounded in and constitutive of social knowing and identity.

What I want to suggest here, then, is that it can be useful to think of academic discourse communities as functioning on different levels or in different dimensions. For convenience, I will call particular attention to two of these. On the one hand, there is what we can call the global, disciplinary level suggested by Kuhn and others; on the other hand, there is the local, institutional level—the workshop or laboratory where practitioners carry on the discipline's day-to-day business of research, teaching, and writing.

We can define the relationship between these two levels or dimensions in these terms: The discipline *authorizes* the activities of the workshop, and in so doing both *drives* and *constrains* it. Everything important to the discipline as a whole—its universe of discourse, its persuasion strategies, its priorities and values, its implied limits, its ways of knowing and coming to know—is palpably present in the workshop. What we study, how we study it, and what kinds of claims we make about it depend on what others have done before us, how they've done it, and the claims they've made about it. Practitioners attempting to bring into the discipline projects conceived in other contexts have few choices: they can drop it, they can do it elsewhere, or they can adjust it (sometimes through protracted, difficult negotiations) so as to make it "admissible" in the discipline. Thus the discipline permits some kinds of inquiry, disallows others.[8]

The workshop, on the other hand, *feeds* and *shapes* the discipline—when, that is, workshop inquiry produces findings appropriate for reporting to and testing on disciplinary levels (and when practitioners' own priorities and sense of authority encourage transforming those findings into texts the discipline's gatekeepers will deem acceptable). Texts go through a process involving negotiations regarding "truth," rhetorical appropriateness, and disciplinary fit; and only if these negotiations are successful might texts "work their way up" out of libraries, offices, workshops and "work their way through" networks of various sorts and editorial boards to achieve the status of disciplinary literature. Once published in disciplinary fora, these texts are brought back into the workshops, to take their places in the conversation.

The relationship between the discipline and its workshops is thus reciprocal. The discipline provides a global context whose power is profoundly heuristic, enabling and motivating the range of issues relevantly addressable in the workshop. The workshop, on the other hand, provides situations in which relevant inquiry can be carried out so as (among other things) to produce the texts that form and reform the discipline. To address the discipline's issues is to participate in the conversation. To participate is to belong.

Kuhn defines this relationship this way:

> . . . one of the things a scientific community acquires with a paradigm is a criterion for choosing problems that, while the paradigm is taken for granted, can be assumed to have solutions. To a great extent these are the only problems that the community will admit as scientific or encourage its members to undertake. Other problems, including many that had previously been standard, are rejected as metaphysical, as the concern of another discipline, or sometimes as just too problematic to be worth the time. (37)

Kuhn might have added that problems can also be rejected as passe, as left over from a no–longer–valid set of assumptions about what is relevant and solvable. In composition studies, examples might include the "problems" of how best to teach traditional grammar's parts of speech or current–traditional rhetoric's formal outline.

Karin Knorr–Cetina, in *The Manufacture of Knowledge*, also points to efficacy as a major criterion for research. But when she addresses the issue of the extent to which the question of what will work operates in the workshop, she adds to the equation important "situational constraints" (59). Scientists working in the lab she studied considered much more than the tacitly–assumed requirements of the discipline when they chose their research projects. Also "involved with an idea's [personal and disciplinary] 'interest' were the chances of convincing the research leader of its value, being able to recruit laboratory assistants, finding

the necessary equipment, being the first to publish, having time to do the work, etc." (59). As one of her informants told her,

> "You try to discriminate. You can get one idea a day, or . . . (in) two days, or one a week, and you discriminate (in terms of) your time and your ability to use it. You know, we have idea files, either in our minds or on paper, but you can't spend a lot of your time on things you don't have the opportunity to perform, or to prove, or to verify. *So you try to limit your interest to the idea you know is going to be the most productive as quickly as possible within the frame of facilities at hand. . .*" (59).
> (Italics Knorr–Cetina's.)

Under constraints imposed not only by the limits of the "disciplinary matrix," then, but also by the limits of human, institutional, and financial resources, inquiry is carried out in the local workshop. Many of the texts generated in the process of inquiry are, however, obviously appropriate only to the task at hand. As well, much of the knowledge resulting from inquiry consists of false starts, drafts that miss the mark, chunks of talk that seem insightful at the time but never get transformed into any kind of written text, and ideas that prove inappropriate, trivial, or just plain wrong. As Knorr–Cetina's informant indicated, we all build up idea files, but we necessarily try to avoid wasting our time on ideas or projects that our knowledge of the discipline—and our discussions with colleagues—tell us will not pay off in the classroom or in texts that might be presented at conferences or published in journals or books. We often leave even good ideas and projects undone—because, perhaps, they are impractical or unusable given available institutional resources; or because our priorities relegate them to back burners that never get lit; or because, simply, we are not trained to conduct the kinds of research required for such projects. Much that goes on in the workshop is never intended for—and would have no place in—the discipline's public fora; and texts put together or drafted in the local situation only sometimes work their way up out of libraries, offices, workshops, and various sorts of networks and invisible colleges.

Roles change as practitioners move between workshop and discipline. As co–workers in institutional workshops we function primarily as *investigators* or *gatherers*. As members of the global discipline, however, we function more as *reporters* or *negotiators* of the results of inquiry. Consequently, writing in the workshop tends to be "question–driven"; it is language used in the service of inquiry. Writing which reports the results of inquiry, on the other hand, tends to be "claim–driven"; it is language in the service of persuading others to assent to its inclusion in the field's knowing.

(It should be clear by now that I use the terms *workshop* and *discipline* to refer not merely—perhaps not even—to places; they are better understood as rhetorical situations or states of mind, defined not so much by where a practitioner is but by what disciplinary activity he or she is engaged in at the moment. With this in mind, it makes sense to say we can identify at least two kinds of gathering. First, of course, practitioners collect information and ideas directly relevant to their own immediate research interests. Second, they keep up on what's going on in the discipline as a whole. Through reading and conference-going they constantly make and remake, for themselves, the contexts within which they must function if they are to continue working in the discipline. This difference between the two kinds of gathering is a key: whereas "in the workshop" [no matter where a practitioner actually is] the gathering focuses on producing results relating to specific research projects, in the discipline the gathering focuses on building an overall context of issues, questions, problems, and scholarly fields within which individual practitioners operate.)

Because discourse is used differently in these dimensions, texts take different forms depending on their specialised uses. In the immediate situation of the workshop, for example, writing and talk can be informal, elastic, and transitory. Their forms are often "made up" to suit immediate and particular needs—not necessarily to be held onto beyond some point of use (e.g., bib cards, reading notes, lists, outlines, and the like). At other times writing is used to negotiate power and position in the local community, to persuade local administrations and funding bodies to support research activities, to earn tenure and promotion. And, of course, this often idiosyncratic discourse is transformed for use in the classroom—as lectures or as hidden agenda in so-called discussion sessions; or, less obviously, as unstated (in the classroom) theory which informs pedagogical practice. (The closer texts move toward the level of the discipline, the more their forms tend to be largely "given" by others.) Not always does this writing find its way into even preliminary drafts of texts meant for disciplinary levels outside the institutional situation. Workshop texts thus tend to be rather less formal and ceremonial than is appropriate in more global dimensions. Instead of "reporting" and "persuading" modes such as speeches, lectures, talks, workshops, proposals, reports, articles, books, we find "gathering" and "exploring" modes such as notes, cards, article and book marginalia, filing systems and computer databases, lists, tree diagrams, drafts, and even more formal sorts of disposable writing.

These different kinds of language have been characterized in a number of ways, each one emphasising different elements. Frank Smith, echoing Susanne Langer's distinction between *signs* and *symbols*, posits two extremes of language-grounding by distinguishing between

'situation–dependent language' and 'language–context–dependent language.' The first is language so 'intimately related to the physical environment in which it is produced' (73–74) that it is not understandable outside the immediate circumstances of its use. The second is language that 'has nothing to do with the situation in which it is produced or in which it is read' (75) and can thus be meaningful in situations other than those in which it was produced.

Linda Flower's influential 1979 *College English* essay distinguishes between reader–based and writer–based prose. Writer–based prose is 'written by a writer to himself and for himself' (19). Since it is 'the record and the working of his own verbal thought,' it is a private and 'undertransformed mode' which reflects 'the associative, narrative path of the writer's own confrontation with her subject' (19–20). To be effective, writer–based prose must be transformed into reader–based prose, an issue–centered mode that attempts to communicate something to a reader (20). This transformation involves reordering and rephrasing to accommodate readers' needs and expectations. Reader–based prose thus reflects not so much writers' processes as their purposes.

More recently, Nevin Laib has argued that 'accomplished writing' is that which succeeds in camouflaging individual and communal motives, so that 'expressive' social and psychological—that is, territorial—aims are rendered less visible and threatening. 'To protect ourselves and to conceal self–gratifying aims,' he claims, 'we learn to express private feelings as public generalizations, to transform simple opinions into reasoned conclusions, and to emphasise socially acceptable motives at the expense of directly social intents like asserting authority or trying to gain acceptance' (580).

Finally, Douglas Barnes draws a distinction between 'exploratory' and 'presentational or 'final draft'' language. The former 'is usually undogmatic; it allows for tentativeness and false starts.' The latter 'is appropriate for occasions such as a lecture when the audience can reasonably expect a high degree of explicitness, clarity, and organization' ('Language' 13). Exploratory language is only sometimes language on the way to presentational language; it is discourse people use (in both private and public circumstances) to 'talk themselves into a better understanding' (Barnes *Communication* 60–61). It helps us explore ideas, issues, problems, questions—on our own and with colleagues—to explain them first of all to ourselves, our students, and our colleagues in the relatively safe environments of our workshops. For Barnes, both are social uses of language.

To sum up: Workshop language tends to be exploratory rather than presentational; private, opinionated, and redolent with personal, territorial motive instead of public, reasoned, and seemingly altruistic; geared (at least initially) more to the needs of the writer than the

reader; firmly grounded in both institutional situations *and* disciplinary contexts. All of this language, equally indispensable, is powerfully generative of more language. All of this language embodies and shapes ranges of discoursing aims, functions, motives, actions, situations.

Invention

If the current textbook advice of our own discipline reflects up–to–date belief, compositionists appear to view invention as a strictly private, individual, cognitive act rather than a socio–cognitive, intersubjective act. Students are urged to practice invention or heuristic strategies ranging from freewriting to looping to tagmemics. They are asked to analyse and respond to "readings" that have been yanked from community, conversational contexts but deemed to be representative of certain discourse forms or conventions. Disembedded from the situations that gave rise to them, conversational turn–takings are transformed into "textoids" (Hunt).

Only very rarely are students put into situations where they use their own or other people's texts heuristically as part of their own conversations, where texts are used in the cycle of reading and writing to build community knowing and identity. But if we ask ourselves where we get information, ideas, arguments, the answer has to be that we get them interactively, out of our transactions with knowledgeable peers and superiors in our workshops and in the discipline's literature. We do not—we cannot—get them in circumstances of conversational dissociation from others: we get them through functioning in disciplined language communities.

Clifford Geertz argues a "view of culture [which] begins with the assumption that human thought is basically both social and public. . ." (45). In this view,

> Thinking consists not of "happenings in the head" (though happenings there and elsewhere are necessary for it to occur) but of a traffic in what have been called . . . significant symbols—words for the most part but also gestures, drawings, musical sounds, mechanical devices like clocks, or natural objects like jewels—anything, in fact, that is disengaged from its mere actuality and used to impose meaning upon experience. From the point of view of any particular individual, such symbols are largely given. He finds them already current in the community when he is born, and they remain, with some additions, subtractions, and partial alterations . . . in circulation after he dies. While he lives he uses them, or some of them, sometimes deliberately and with care, most often spontaneously and with ease, but

> always with the same end in view: to put a construction upon the events through which he lives, to orient himself within "the ongoing course of experienced things. . ." (45).

Since disciplinary practice occurs only under conditions of situation– and language–context–dependence (to use Smith's terms), invention cannot be a strictly private act. What makes more sense is to believe we function together by using mutually significant symbols, out of them constructing our knowing and thus making sense of our experience. Constituted in and through language, the discipline provides what Kenneth Burke calls "terministic screens"—"nomenclature [which] necessarily directs the attention into some channels rather than into others" ("Screens" 45). Furthermore, according to Burke,

> Not only does the nature of our terms affect the nature of our observations, in the sense that the terms direct the attention to one field rather than another. Also, *many of the "observations" are but implications of the particular terminology in terms of which the observations are made*. In brief, much that we take as observations about "reality" may be but the spinning out of possibilities implicit in our particular choice of terms. (46)

Practitioners work always within sets of choices available in (and sanctioned by) the discourse community; we cannot, strictly speaking, choose our own terms, because nomenclature is a given of social, "tribal" ("Screens" 53) belonging. Neither can we use text forms or inquiry methods that are uniquely our own (if, indeed, there are such things). We are constrained by our notions of what the community will sanction and of what is possible in terms of institutional, collegial, and personal resources (training, inclination, priorities, and so on). We are constrained, in short, by our sense of what can reasonably be expected to work. Since social nomenclature, forms, and methods function as "templates" through which we view our experience (I believe the metaphor is George Kelly's), we see *as community members*: we see collaboratively, in concert with our peers; for the most part, we observe no more or less than what our community participation enables us to observe.

Elsewhere, in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke demonstrates just how thoroughly discoursers must belong (or seem to belong) to a community if they are to function as members: "You persuade a man," he says,

> only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his. Persuasion by flattery . . . can safely serve as our paradigm if we . . . see behind it the conditions of identification or consubstantiality in general. And you give the "signs" of

> such consubstantiality by deference to an audience's 'opinions.' For the orator, following Aristotle and Cicero, will seek to display the appropriate 'signs' of character needed to earn the audience's good will. True, the rhetorician may have to change an audience's opinion in one respect; but he can succeed only insofar as he yields to that audience's opinions in other respects. Some of their opinions are needed to support the fulcrum by which he would move their opinions. (55–56)

What persuades is what is negotiated in relation to already-resident opinion and convention. Available means of persuasion—what invention is meant to discover—are by and large those means which have succeeded in negotiating community assent. (This explains why we are almost never surprised by what we read in our professional literature: if it were *truly* surprising it would not have gotten there in the first place [it would be what Rorty calls 'abnormal discourse' (320)]; everything new in the literature is bound up in what we already know and believe, and, thus, in what we are prepared to know and believe.)

But Invention is not merely grounded in social and public action; it is itself a public and social act. James Raymond has pointed out that "because enthymemes [which are the ends of invention] presume upon what an audience already knows or believes, they can express in a condensed or elliptical manner chains of logical connections that would be complex indeed if the assumptions themselves had to be demonstrated" (144). Invention and writing and thinking are profoundly social, then, in that they always occur as turn-takings in conversations. Thinking is always thinking *in terms of* and *in relation to* others' thinking. It is always transactive in nature and aim. Although every discoursing act is certainly different from every other, and every utterance requires its own distinctive inventive acts, the process is impelled by relations to the discourse of fellow conversers. Invention cannot occur in a social vacuum. There never was and never can be a disciplinary "square one" in which individual practitioners act alone.

These notions become clearer when we consider some of the motives for participating in the conversation (and thus invention). Commonly, the function of invention is defined in terms of a need to generate content and arguments without regard to rhetorical exigency. Burke, however, tells us that "every document bequeathed us by history must be treated as a *strategy for encompassing a situation*" (*Philosophy* 109). When we situate utterances in ongoing conversation, we see they embody strategies aimed to assist practitioners in their collaborative projects of developing the community and their own relationships within the community. Invention is motivated by needs to fill gaps and resolve problems not only in

one's own knowing, but also in the community's.

Finally, just as texts and text functions vary according to practitioners' needs and aims, so also does invention itself vary as practitioners take on their different roles in the community. The different kinds of texts appropriate for different community dimensions each have special uses in mediating relationships among inquirers, other texts, other inquirers, the inquirer's own emerging and developing texts, the discipline's expectations. Invention serving investigation and gathering thus differs in kind and result from invention serving reporting, negotiating, and persuading. In over–simple terms, invention serving gathering tends to generate subject matter, while invention serving any kind of transcontextualization tends to generate arguments, structure. Texts have different uses as our needs, aims, and roles change; and uses (rather than forms) are what really matter. Function and motive are more powerfully heuristic than 'mere form' can ever be, because more is at stake.

Learning to Write

Michael Polanyi urges us to consider "the suppositions which underlie the method by which [our] assertions are arrived at. We assimilate most of these pre–suppositions," he says,

> by learning to speak of things in a certain language, in which there are names for various kinds of objects, names by which objects can be classified. . . . When we accept a certain set of pre–suppositions and use them as our interpretative framework, we may be said to dwell in them as we do in our own body. Their uncritical acceptance for the time being consists in a process of assimilation by which we identify ourselves with them. . . . It is by his assimilation of the framework of science that the scientist makes sense of experience. (59–60)[4]

Like Burke, Polanyi suggests that becoming a member of a community involves assimilating and identifying with the perspectives and beliefs of the community. (Kuhn says we 'go native' [204].) I think we do not understand very well how, through discourse, we come to identify so thoroughly with one another that we achieve the consubstantiality Burke ascribes to us or the ability to co–dwell in pre–suppositions that Polanyi ascribes to us. But one means by which we *signal* (and get control over) identity and co–dwelling seems to be through the language of attribution and scholarly debt, as manifested in the discipline's literature through conventions of academic reference and citation. Anthropologist Harry Wolcott says that "foremost among [the ethnographer's credentials] is . . . a familiarity and basic compatibility with anthropology's perspective and terminology, a certain ease in knowing the 'proper footnotes,' and a sense of the development of the discipline and the relationships

among its major subfields' (115). My references to Oakeshott, Geertz, Kuhn, Burke, Bruffee, and others orient my text and its auditors—in terms not only of content but also of terminology, style, form. They at the same time bring me and my readers into the circle of those who identify with some of the utterances of these voices in the conversation. What I have written in this essay calls up for me and my readers ways of seeing that put a special construction on reality by immersing us in sub-communities in which those turn-takers' utterances are deemed assentable and, in varying degrees, powerful and central. Insofar as this text succeeds as community discourse, it offers a socio-conceptual ground against which intersubjective dissonances can be attended to and put into tune. The assumptions and claims of this essay—both old and new—are thus fashioned not only out of my reading and use of those discoursers' texts; they are also built on sets of assumptions my readers and I share about the place of those texts in the discipline's knowing.

It is wholly appropriate in this context, then, to listen once more to a significant voice in our conversation, Kenneth Burke, who argues that "the human animal, as we know it, *emerges into personality* by first mastering whatever tribal speech happens to be its particular symbolic environment" ("Screens" 53). Constituted in and through language, disciplines are symbolic environments. Becoming a member of a discipline is thus no trivial matter. If as children we emerged into personality as we learned our native language (and defined ourselves within our native communities by taking on family, social, and individual dialects of that language), then it follows that learning the language of academia effectively required something of a change in personality. Because it meant learning another complex set of dialectic options and limits, becoming academics involved for most of us a degree of "retribalization" or re-acculturation. Our initiation into this symbolic environment required us to redefine our places in our native symbolic environments.

Another voice is that of M. M. Bakhtin, who tells us that "in all areas of life and ideological activity [and an academic discipline is nothing if it is not ideological activity], our speech is filled to overflowing with other people's words" (337). Bakhtin says that "language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other" and that language "becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention" (293). We learn from our participation in discourse communities not only language, but also style, values, motives, attitudes, ways of seeing. We do so by trying out, in the context of our own intentions, chunks of other people's language. Hence Bakhtin can say that

> The tendency to assimilate others' discourse takes on an even deeper and

> more basic significance in an individual's ideological becoming, in the most fundamental sense. Another's discourse performs here no longer as information, directions, rules, models, and so forth—but strives rather to determine the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behavior. . . . (342)

As Burke says, the process is an *emerging*—not sudden, not quick. It happens only gradually, resulting not merely from an occasional, random brush with academic discourse. Becoming an academic requires immersion in academic thinking, to assimilate and take it over for one's own intentions. It requires a giving up of oneself to the assumptions, values, and conventions implicit in that thinking. It requires taking on new behaviors, new roles. Clearly this cannot be accomplished in an academic term or two; it takes years.

Knowing this allows us to ask where it all begins. What is basic, essential? The answer is not discourse conventions, but discoursing itself—reading and writing, listening and talking for the purposes of sharing and advancing knowledge out of texts that rely on one another in intersubjective, collaborative ways.

In *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, Burke dramatizes this process for us:

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you. . . . However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (110–111)[5]

The point is, we do not come to know and belong by having others retrace for us the steps that have gone before. Even if someone could do that for us, we would not thereby become members of the community. Neither does membership result merely from study and analysis of forms or conventions. Belonging begins when we put in our oar (and comes to fullness, presumably, when those who preceded us react to our utterances as if we had managed to get *both* oars in). Membership comes from taking part in the conversation, constructing out of what we hear and say our own versions of the knowing that allows us to belong.

Written texts—of all kinds and forms, for all kinds of uses—are at the center of academic discourse communities. They are the source and basis of our disciplinary literacy. We become members of an academic discourse community by reading and writing, not only to gather, report, and persuade, but also to assume an *identity* with and within the community. Texts move around and through the community at all its levels. Texts authored by others and by ourselves—books, articles, notes on talks and lectures, marginalia, records of various sorts—are brought into and used in the workshop. These texts provide us with information that enables us to put a construction on the community's knowing and being, and that allows and advances our own scholarly projects. Hence the global, disciplinary level of the discourse community is brought into local workshops, to block (in its conserving way) some kinds of work and to invite (in its liberating way) some others. As they are put to their various uses in gathering, reporting, and negotiating, these texts (our own and others') undergo, as required for our varying uses, uncountable contextualizations and transcontextualizations, combinations and recombinations.

Texts thus have dozens of uses in these situations, but their most important use is to build learning out of learning, through reading and writing, listening and talking. This is always the cycle. Texts are brought into the community and read for their usefulness to the project of advancing the community's and the individual's purposes. What advances those purposes is what constructs and constitutes its "body of knowledge." A construct of community conversation, this body is the ground out of which new texts, newly informed, arise. The discipline's changing literature is constantly being searched and sifted through for information, concepts, ways of seeing that might prove relevant to personal, professional aims and in turn nurture our own utterances.

So, this much we can certainly know about the relationship between reading and writing—and insofar as we know this we know something about how we must proceed if we are to bring ourselves and others into membership in discourse communities: We could not write within the community if we did not read in and use its discourse for our own and communal purposes. We could not write if we could not read what others had written, if we did not have others to write to, and if we did not have some sense of their responses to our readings and writings. These activities put a construction on knowing. We each assimilate—or, more accurately, we take over, to suit our purposes—the community's discoursing, knowing, and belonging ways as we learn to function with them in our own reading and writing. Our own constructions on knowing give us something of value to say to the community as a whole. It is difficult to imagine that we can come to know and use the

community's ways in any other manner or for any other motive. We may not fully understand *how* those ways are learned, but we surely know they cannot be learned without reading and writing texts in which they signify and identify.

Just as important, however, is that on all the community's levels we work with colleagues who are like us, but who are not us, and who function *as* colleagues—listening and reading, talking and writing back. Because they are like us they can put appropriate constructions on what we say; and because they are different from us—in backgrounds, educations, influences, professional priorities and values, projects, methodologies, styles, ways of seeing—we have much to learn from them. Despite our "identities," we know differently from one another. Hence we watch what we make of each other's texts, how we construct them. What we see and hear tells us how clear we make ourselves, how successfully we persuade, how important what we say might be. We thus come to understand and assess strengths and weaknesses, gaps in information and logic, misstatements, vaguenesses, claims to hit harder and pull back on, claims to buttress with details, and so on. On the basis of this feedback we learn to appraise more precisely what will work, what we can get by with, what will be perceived as a strength or a short–coming, what will persuade and be useful and what will not.

As Louise Wetherbee Phelps notes, literacy "requires not only a motivating and nurturing context but the systematic help of expert practitioners" (187). Phelps is talking here about the development of children's literacy, but the same applies to developing our own community literacies. We get this help from colleagues within our own institutions and in intercollegial networks of practitioners who share interests, from journal editors and referees who critique our work, and from those who respond to our utterances in public fora. To facilitate this help we have developed "shoptalk," which, according to Phelps, is language we

> have worked out for cultivating and talking about expertise to one another and to beginners. Such talk is highly technical in focus and content yet treats craft as instrumental to higher goals. It offers a vocabulary of distinctions among such concepts as technique, skill, strategy, tactics, craft, art, know–how, and knowledge. (187).

Acquiring literacy involves both unself–conscious immersion and deliberate, conscious attention to craft in contexts of "real" uses for the texts we encounter and produce. With the help of colleagues at all levels we sharpen our abilities to use reading and writing to serve personal and communal programs and goals.

Is there another way besides through reading and writing in collaborative contexts where information and ideas matter, where community identity matters? Can we learn to write and

read only by taking a few courses and trying to read a few textbooks? Can we learn to write and read by going through any number of disembedded, non–functional exercises or "practicings" (Goffman 59–65)? Not unless those practicings occur in the context of impending realities such as those that even now impinge on me and my reader. Practicings have to be *for* something. The lives of active academics teem with self– and other–imposed deadlines and a range of responsibilities and obligations. Classes have to be prepared, courses have to be designed; memos, articles, and books have to be read; reports, proposals, conference papers, and articles have to be researched and written; colleagues' papers have to be read and responded to; and so on. But the most important of all these realities is the sense of authority and place that taking part in the conversation gives us. Had these realities never imposed themselves, we could not have learned anything more than how to mask our utterances in superficial conventions and forms. We would not thereby belong; and neither would we *feel* we belonged.

The simple fact is that discourse conventions and forms, although necessary signs of belonging, are not all there is to belonging. They are only part of what allows practitioners to read and write "from the inside." Learning to write means discovering (or rediscovering) that written texts *are* conversational utterances. It means understanding the power of written texts to *do*—to develop new knowledge, to change others' behavior and beliefs (and to have others' writing change us), to establish social–professional relationships in situations where learning and intellectual identity matter. Learning to write also requires developing a sense of the complexity and breadth of community concerns; a sense of ways members can organize their investigations of those concerns; a sense of how the people who address the issues and problems behave—how they rely on and work collaboratively with one another, how they write, and so on.

Perhaps most important of all, an ability to write as an academic requires coming to a clear understanding of who we are in terms of our constructive similarities and differences. For that understanding is the true source of authority in discourse communities. Personal and community identity and difference are the source of things worth saying; they are not so much relations to subject matter as relations to others' knowing.

Notes

My wife Jackie and my colleagues Russell Hunt and Douglas Vipond have put their oars in at several points along the way of this conversation. They said things each time that made me give my head a shake, and I thank them.

[1]Kuhn does not confront philosophical issues related to the use of the term *share*, and, although I also use this term (and Burke's notion of identification), neither will I very directly address these issues. Burke, of course, insists that his terms always involve us with their opposites, so that *identification* includes not only consubstantiality but also dissociation; and I try to demonstrate the roles both sameness and difference play in academic discourse communities.

[2]To the extent that academic disciplines *are* "bodies" of knowledge, this claim is creditable. After all, it is only public discourse that can effect a change in the shape and substance of that body of knowledge. Discourse which is not "taken into" that body cannot alter it as a public entity.

[3]This is well illustrated in the role and power journals have in an academic discourse community. As Robert J. Connors points out in his review article on journals in composition studies, journal editors and editorial boards exercise central "institutional authority," insofar as they function "as 'gates,' determining what sorts of scholarship will be accredited, deemed permissible" (352). Disciplinarily sanctioned journal editors' policies are so influential as to result in a "selective perpetuation of new ideas" (352). They thereby have "an immense effect on what constitutes the body of knowledge defining the discipline itself" (352).

[4]Cf. the quotation from Clifford Geertz, above, pp. 9–10.

[5]I thank Tilly and John Warnock for calling my attention to this wonderfully apt little allegory of academic behavior.

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